

NPQML Case Study

Improving attainment of spelling in KS1/2 from the implementation of a Spelling Bee programme

Name: Jordan Leybourne

School: Stannington First School

I am an aspiring leader working in a rural school in Northumberland. I currently lead English across a First school that was last graded 'Good' in 2017 by Ofsted. The focus of my NPQML initiative was to improve overall spelling ability across key stage 1 and 2. I chose this focus as it was highlighted within my school data and school improvement plan as an area for development. It was also emphasised by Ofsted as a stand-alone weakness across our Key stage 2 writing, despite overall good attainment in writing. Overall, I believe that our school used to focus a lot on phonics, which is identified as a strength within our school by staff, and phonetic spelling was therefore a common feature of pupils' writing.

At the beginning of my school initiative, I looked into different spelling schemes that my school could adopt. However, after previously using a relatively high costing spelling scheme with limited impact, I was hesitant about buying into a new scheme that may not produce the desired impact. I therefore designed my own programme and budgeted for resources that would help us make changes to the way spelling was taught and produce a focus on resilience and effort as a way to reward and motivate the pupils. Having this focus on positive mental attitude from the beginning allowed me to minimise many of the risks I had identified on my risk-assessment.

As part of the initiative, I lead the lower Key stage 2 teacher and a supporting level 3 teaching assistant initially, then integrated the KS1 and EYFS staff into my initiative at a later date. All staff involved were responsible for facilitating a weekly verbal 'Spelling Bee', instead of a spelling test, as well as using specific spelling activities from a spelling programme 'Bee a Speller' 3 mornings a week. I also sent out an informative parents' guide at the beginning of the school year to advise parents on the theory behind my spelling bee programme and to demonstrate the best way to facilitate spelling practice at home with their child. As a result of my tailored spelling programme, the percentage of pupils achieving expected spelling standard across KS1 summative data increased dramatically with a rise of 35% compared to the previous academic year. I am continuing to monitor this data and develop our approaches to suit our school as the pupil numbers grow. The level 3 teaching assistant involved in the project was quoted saying that the changes "have put spelling on the map and made it fun for the children". All members of our school team have seen an overall improvement in pupil attitudes as well as team spirit, perseverance and resilience which form some of our school values.

At the beginning of my initiative I was goal focused and was particularly enthusiastic about promoting change and performance results. In reality, there were some barriers such as getting all members of staff on board to increase the capability of the team. Throughout my initiative, these barriers have developed how I plan collaboration as a middle leader and have helped me to have a self-awareness of my strengths and weaknesses that I have developed. I found that the leadership of my in school initiative had to consider the implementation of routine teaching strategies within subjects and the careful planning and timetabling of teaching to consistently embed learning. I thoroughly planned my meetings to utilise my teams' skillset to make positive improvements. As a result, I am more aware of the different personalities and skills of members of my team and how to support these to promote team work, cooperation and pupil impact. I feel my initiative has generally improved the capability of my team as it has drawn a greater focus and awareness of fun ways to teach spelling and how to inspire pupils to want to achieve in a frequently unpopular area of the curriculum.